

# Mount Kupe and its birds

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**Résumé:** Le mont Kupé est situé à la frontière des Provinces du Sud-Ouest et du Littoral du Cameroun du sud. Quelques 25 km<sup>2</sup> de forêt primaire subsistent, surtout entre 900 m et le sommet de la montagne, à 2050 m. Plus de 320 espèces y ont été notées à ce jour. Au total 27 espèces d'oiseaux ont une distribution limitée aux forêts de montagne du Cameroun occidental, de la zone juste au delà de la frontière au Nigéria, et de Bioko (Fernando Po). De celles-ci, 15 ont été notées dans la forêt du mont Kupé, et deux d'entre elles furent décrites pour la première fois de la montagne: la Timalie à gorge blanche *Kupeornis gilberti*, en 1949, et la Pie-grièche du mont Kupé *Telophorus kupeensis*, en 1952. La dernière espèce n'a été trouvée nulle part ailleurs. La forêt compte également diverses espèces de mammifères, notamment de primates, comprenant probablement la dernière population viable du Drill *Mandrillus leucophaeus*, et bon nombres de Chimpanzés *Pan troglodytes* et de Moustacs à oreilles rousses *Cercopithecus erythrotis*. Quelques notes sont incluses sur les conditions d'accès et d'hébergement et sur les moyens de transport disponibles.

Mount Kupe is situated on the border between the South-west and Littoral Provinces of southern Cameroon. About 25 km<sup>2</sup> of primary forest remains, mostly between 900 m and the summit of the mountain at 2050 m above sea level, and so far over 320 bird species have been recorded in it. A total of 27 bird species are restricted to the montane forests of western Cameroon, Bioko (Fernando Po), and just across the border into Nigeria. Fifteen of these have been recorded in the Mount Kupe forest, and two of them were first described from the mountain, the White-throated Mountain Babbler in 1949 and the Mount Kupe Bush-shrike in 1952. The latter has not been found anywhere else. The forest also supports a range of mammals, in particular primates, the most important of which are probably the last viable population of the endangered Drill *Mandrillus leucophaeus*, and good numbers of Chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes* and Red-nosed Guenon *Cercopithecus erythrotis*.

The main threats to the forest include agricultural encroachment and local extraction of timber, and many of the mammals are being over-hunted, again particularly the eight species of primate. These are the main reasons why in 1991 BirdLife International started a conservation and development project, the Mount Kupe Forest Project, now based at Nyasoso, to secure the future of this forest.

## Ornithological history

William Serle, a Scottish medical doctor and lay preacher, used to spend weekends in the late 1940s and early 1950s based at the Government Rest House in Nyasoso from which he studied and collected with his Nigerian assistant Gilbert. Indeed, most subsequent ornithological work has been carried out from Nyasoso.

Since then, Eisentraut did some collecting in the 1960s for birds and bats, but virtually no other work was carried out until 1984 when an International Council for Bird Preservation team of seven, led by Simon Stuart, spent over two weeks on the mountain as part of a survey of the whole mountain chain<sup>1</sup>. In 1989 Duncan McNiven spent several days on the mountain and was the first person since 1952 to see the bush-shrike. The following year Mark Andrews and Peter Hayman spent two months surveying the bush-shrike in particular, and in 1991 BirdLife International started the present project which has encouraged a succession of visitors and more comprehensive coverage has been achieved. The total species list now stands at 322, a figure that has increased every month since the project began.



Mount Kupe Bush-shrike *Malaconotus kupeensis*  
by S. Mark Andrews

## Key bird species occurring on Mount Kupe

Apart from the bush-shrike, five other species are treated in full by the *African Red Data Book*<sup>2</sup>, four

more are classified as 'near-threatened' and a further 29 are listed as candidate species for inclusion in the red data list. Since these species include most of Mount Kupe's specialities, they are presented in Table 1 together with a summary of their status and the altitudes at which they occur.

Collar and Stuart<sup>2</sup> fail to mention only one of these, namely the Brown-backed Cisticola. One other species worthy of inclusion is Crossley's Ground Thrush which has a very restricted distribution but was presumably omitted by Collar and Stuart because they considered it a subspecies of the Orange Ground Thrush *Zoothera gurneyi*.

The species mentioned in the *Red Data Book* are, by definition, the most important in conservation terms, but the overall diversity is also high. For example, there are eight species of kingfisher, eight woodpeckers, seven honeyguides, all three African trogons, 21 greenbuls, 14 shrikes, including six of the *Malacotus* genus, five wattle-eyes and 17 sunbirds.

## Birdwatching on Mount Kupe

Nyasoso, at an altitude of 850 m, provides the best access to the forest. It is the highest sizable village and has primary forest as well as farms and secondary forest all within easy walking distance (Figure 1). It is possible

**Table 1** Red Data Book Species (mentioned by Collar and Stuart<sup>2</sup>) which occur on Mount Kupe  
**Table 1** Espèces du mont Kupé figurant au Livre Rouge (mentionnées par Collar et Stuart<sup>2</sup>).

E = endemic to the mountain chain NT = recorded regularly on the nature trail at Nyasoso  
E = endémique de la chaîne de montagnes du Cameroun occidental, NT = noté régulièrement le long de la piste à Nyasoso.

### Species given full treatment

White-throated Mountain Babbler <i>Kupeornis gilberti</i>	E	Common above 1400m
Grey-necked Rockfowl <i>Picathartes oreas</i>	NT	Uncommon
Mount Kupe Bush-shrike <i>Malacotus kupeensis</i>	E	Scarce 930-1450m
Green-breasted Bush-shrike <i>Malacotus gladiator</i>	E	Uncommon 1400-2000m
Monteiro's Bush-shrike <i>Malacotus monteiroi</i>		1 or 2 records 1400-1500m
Bates's Weaver <i>Ploceus batesi</i>		2 records 900m

### Near-Threatened Species

White-naped Pigeon <i>Columba albinucha</i>		4 records 1000-1550m
Cameroon Montane Greenbul <i>Andropadus montanus</i>	E	Uncommon 1550m, clearings
Grey-headed Greenbul <i>Phyllostrephus poliocephalus</i>	E NT	Common 900-2000m
Ursula's Sunbird <i>Nectarinia ursulae</i>	E NT	Common 900-2000m

### Candidate Species

Congo Serpent Eagle <i>Dryotriorchis spectabilis</i>		2 records 900-1000m
Ayres' Hawk Eagle <i>Hieraetus dubius ayresii</i>		2 records 1000m
Cassin's Hawk Eagle <i>Spizaetus africanus</i>	NT	Fairly common 800-2000m
Cameroon Olive Pigeon <i>Columba sjostedti</i>	E	Fairly common 1400-2000m
Sandy Scops Owl <i>Otus icterorhynchus</i>		1 record 1550m
Red-chested Owlet <i>Glaucidium tephronotum</i>		Uncommon 1000-2000m
Chestnut-backed Owlet <i>Glaucidium sjostedti</i>		1 record 1200m
Black Spinetail <i>Telacanthura melanopygia</i>		1 record 850m
Bates's Swift <i>Apus batesi</i>	NT	Uncommon 850-2000m
Bare-cheeked Trogon <i>Apaloderma aequatoriale</i>		Uncommon 1000-2000m

Zenker's Honeyguide <i>Melignomon zenkeri</i>		Uncommon 900-1200m
Tullberg's Woodpecker <i>Campethera tullbergi</i>		Common 1400-2000m
Grey-headed Broadbill <i>Smithornis sharpei</i>	NT	Fairly common 900-2000m
Forest Swallow <i>Hirundo fuliginosa</i>	NT	Common 850-2000m
Cameroon Olive Greenbul <i>Phyllostrephus poensis</i>	E NT	Fairly common 900-2000m
Mountain Robin-Chat <i>Cossypha isabellae</i>	E	Common 1400-2000m
White-bellied Robin-chat <i>Cossyphula roberti</i>		Fairly common 1000-2000m
Grey-chested Illadopsis <i>Kakamega poliothorax</i>		Fairly common 1400-2000m
Green Longtail <i>Urolais epichlora</i>	E NT	Common 900-2000m
Black-capped Woodland Warbler <i>Phylloscopus herberti</i>	E NT	Common 850-2000m
White-tailed Warbler <i>Poliolais lopesi</i>	E	Common, clearings 1000-2000m
Olivaceous Alseonax <i>Muscicapa olivascens</i>		1 record 900m
Violet-backed Lhlylota <i>Lhlylota violacea</i>	NT	Uncommon 900-1100m
Black-necked Wattle-eye <i>Platysteira chalybea</i>		Uncommon 1000-1600m
White-spotted Wattle-eye <i>Platysteira tonsa</i>		Uncommon 900-1200m
White-bellied Crested Flycatcher <i>Trochocercus aliventris</i>		Fairly common 1400-2000m
Mountain Sooty Boubou <i>Laniarius poensis</i>		Common 1200-2000m
Cameroon Blue-headed Sunbird <i>Nectarinia oritis</i>	E NT	Common 1100-2000m
Fernando Po Olive-back <i>Nesocharis shelleyi</i>	E	Fairly common 1500-2000m

### Additional Species (see text)

Crossley's Ground Thrush <i>Zoothera (gurneyi) crossleyi</i>		Fairly common 900-2000m
Brown-backed Cisticola <i>Cisticola (hunteri) discolor</i>	E	Uncommon 1900-2000m

to reach the forest from other villages but in most cases it is much further, accommodation is more problematical and local people may be more wary of strangers.

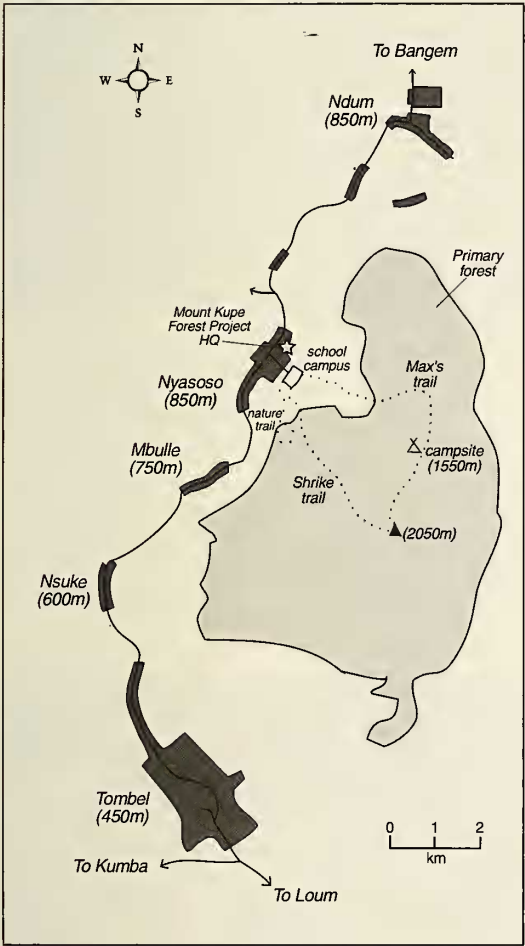


Figure 1 Mount Kupe forest area and the marked trails.  
*Figure 1 La zone de forêt du mont Kupé et les pistes marquées qui la traversent.*

There are three main trails from Nyasoso. The shortest and easiest of access is the Mount Kupe Forest Project nature trail which despite being less than 1 km long and being right at the edge of the village has many of the specialities (see Table 1). There is a trail leaflet and map available from the project office. However, several of the endemics are only found at higher elevations and several of the species which occur throughout are more numerous above 1200 m.

The mountain slopes are steep and the two longer trails are hard going (see Figure 1) although there are

camp sites on both. The 'shrike trail' is the steepest and very quickly reaches primary forest. The initial climb into forest up to 950 m takes you through a combination of secondary and mature growth. The immediate elevation provides an excellent view from the forest floor to the canopy and is worth a short stop. This and the next 100 m in altitude provide a good opportunity to observe many traditional 'lowland' species alongside some montane endemics. From around 950 m the trail follows up through ridge-based habitat with alternating flats and climbs. The ridges here are narrow and provide perfect concentrated viewing for birds as they traverse the forest. Most sightings of the Mount Kupe Bush-shrike have been along this trail between 950 and 1350 m. The ideal way of looking for the species is to sit and observe downward through the forest between two and ten metres from the ground. The species rarely calls loudly although its continuous 'insect-like' grating would be heard if the forest was otherwise quiet. The trail between 1100 and 1400 m provides ample opportunity to see a number of specialities and, in particular, Crossley's Ground Thrush favours this area.

The other trail ('Max's') passes through farms and secondary forest for the first 2 km, up to 1050 m, and then continues through primary forest right to the summit. It is the farms which provide the best bird-watching in terms of diversity and numbers of birds being visible. Once inside the forest your first 'goodie' could well be a seemingly-resident Zenker's Honeyguide which frequents a patch of forest around 1060 m. Although the bush-shrike has been observed along this trail, the mountain's other specialities should draw the observer. The initial climb provides ample opportunity to get to many of them from Black-necked Wattle-eye



White Spotted Wattle-eye *Platysteira tonsa*  
by S. Mark Andrews





Figure 2 The location of Mount Kupe in western Cameroon.  
Figure 2 Situation du mont Kupe au Cameroun occidental.

to Bare-cheeked Trogon. The climb between 1350 m and the elevated plateau at 1550 m offers an excellent opportunity to observe the elusive Green-breasted Bush-shrike. Imitation of its mournful whistle could bring in more than anticipated as the rediscovery of Monteiro's Bush-shrike here in 1992 illustrates (see page 26 of this issue of the *Bulletin*). The level plateau at 1550 m with its 'cloud forest' appearance is an ideal spot for seeing the excitable White-throated Mountain Babbler moving around in noisy groups.

On the shrike trail there is a camp site at 1200 m on an elevated bench at the ridge top (at the convergence with another ridge), and another on Max's. Visitors can stay at both of these and arrange for supplies to be brought from the village. Those planning a visit to either of the longer trails are encouraged to employ a

local guide, and this is essential for anyone planning to reach the summit.

## How to get there and where to stay

Nyasoso is a three-hour drive from Douala where car-hire is possible (four-wheel drive is advisable in the rainy season from June to October). A more economical way is by 'bush-taxi' which can take three to six hours depending on connections at Loum and Tombel where you have to change vehicles (Figure 2). Accommodation is available in Nyasoso where there is a guest house, and other rooms are becoming available. There is also a good cheap guest house in Tombel (Alson's) for anyone needing to stop there. Booking for Nyasoso is not essential, but is advisable through the Mount Kupe Forest Project co-ordinators who will also send up-to-date information on travel, accommodation and other facilities on request (contact c/o WWF Douala, Fax 43 21 71 or write c/o Guinness address below).

Wildlife tourism is being actively promoted by the Mount Kupe Forest Project as an income generating benefit of conserving the forest and its wildlife. For this reason efforts are being made to make sure that as many local people as possible, such as guides and porters, are involved. Visitors are encouraged to spend time in bars to explain why they have come and of course to increase trade! Nyasoso gives a special opportunity for westerners to spend time in a rural African community which for many is a great attraction in itself. For those wishing to visit Korup National Park as well as Mount Kupe there are plans to make a vehicle available for hire between the two locations to encourage visits to both areas. ☺

## Acknowledgements

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## References

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2. Collar, N.J. and Stuart, S.N. 1985. *Threatened birds of Africa and related islands: the ICBP/IUCN red data book*. Cambridge, ICBP/IUCN.

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Mount Kupe, home to 15 of the 27 species endemic to the Cameroon Highlands. (Mark Andrews)  
*Le mont Kupé, habitat de 15 des 27 espèces endémiques des régions montagneuses du Cameroun. (Mark Andrews)*



Chestnut-backed Owlet, *Glaucidium sjostedti*, seldom seen but frequently heard on Mount Kupe. (Mount Kupe, Paul Donald)  
*La Chevêchette à queue barrée Glaucidium sjostedti, rarement observée mais entendue fréquemment au mont Kupé. (Mont Kupé, Paul Donald)*



Grey-necked Picathartes, *Picathartes oreas*, one of the gems found on Mount Kupe (BirdLife International)  
*Le Picatharte chauve du Cameroun Picathartes oreas, un des joyaux du mont Kupé. (BirdLife International)*





Shoebill, *Balaeniceps rex*, one of the most sought-after species in Africa. (Murchison Falls NP, Uganda, September 1992, Alan Brown)  
*Le Bec-en-sabot du Nil Balaeniceps rex, une des espèces les plus recherchées d'Afrique. (PN de Murcheson Falls, Ouganda, septembre 1992, Alan Brown)*



Crossley's Ground Thrush, *Zoothera crossleyi*, a restricted range species endemic to the forests of Cameroon and south-east Nigeria. (Mount Kupe, Chris Bowden)  
*La Grive terrestre de Crossley Zoothera crossleyi, espèce à distribution limitée, endémique des forêts du Cameroun et du sud-est du Nigéria. (Mont Kupé, Chris Bowden)*